

California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

Thursday, May 18, 2006

Merced County Board of Supervisors Chambers

2222 M Street

Merced, CA 95340

Public Forum for Merced County: 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Summary of Public Forum Proceedings

As Chair of the Partnership, Secretary Sunne Wright McPeak welcomed attendees to the Merced public forum held by the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley and gave a brief overview of the formation of the Partnership and its activities to date. She thanked the City of Los Banos and California Women for Agriculture who sponsored the refreshments, lunch and dinner the night before. Deputy co-chairs Supervisor Connie Conway and Fritz Grupe were introduced and made welcoming remarks.

Mayor Mike Amabile and Sharron Thornton, Partnership Board Members representing Merced County, also made welcoming remarks.

Dee Dee D'Adamo, representing Congressman Dennis Cardoza, read welcoming remarks from the Congressman. The Congressman expressed his support for the Partnership and its efforts, and shared the issues which he finds to be the most important ones facing the Valley.

Cheryl Lang, representing Congressman Jim Costa, expressed the Congressman's appreciation for the Partnership and his desire for collaboration with the Partnership.

Secretary McPeak began the testimony portion of the public forum by referring to the five questions taken directly from the Governor's Executive Order establishing the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. The questions were provided to those invited to give testimony and available to members of the public upon arrival.

Three panels of local leaders were invited to provide testimony based on the five questions. Mike Amabile, Mayor of the City of Los Banos, chaired the panel portion of the testimony and introduced the government panel:

Government Panel

Mike Nelson, Chairman, Merced County Board of Supervisors

Lee Anderson, Superintendent, Merced County Office of Education

John Garamendi, Jr., Vice Chancellor, University of California Merced

Frank Quintero, Economic Development Officer, City of Merced

Mark Pazin, Merced County Sheriff

Robert Smith, Special Projects Director, Merced Department of Public Works

Steve Rath, City Manager, City of Los Banos

Jess Brown, Merced County Association of Governments

Panel members stressed the importance of infrastructure development, the need to increase the availability of opportunities for vocational and adult education through a variety of programs offered by local school districts, community colleges and UC Merced. A medical school associated with UC Merced is considered a great possible economic development generator, however, waste treatment expansion and control of air pollution must follow all economic development measures. Improvements on the east west connector highways between Highway 99 and Interstate 5 are important for goods movement and driver safety. The proliferation of methamphetamine in the Valley must be dealt with. The Blueprint process being undertaken by the 8 county Councils of Government is needed to help coordinate the vision for the Valley's future.

Mike Amabile introduced the business panel:

Business Panel

Mark Hendrickson, President, Merced County Chamber of Commerce
Scott Galbraith, Merced County Economic Development Corporation
Louie Bandoni, President, Merced County Farm Bureau
Kevin Stone, Home Builders Association

Comments from the business group included issues affecting small businesses. The need for regional economic development was stressed. The concept of an enterprise zone designation for the entire length of Highway 99 was suggested. The area is heavily impacted by people who commute to the Bay Area for work. Many of these people are constantly searching for work in the Valley, but job development has not kept pace with housing to allow for them to find jobs near where they live. Renewable energy is already a focus of UC Merced and the job growth could occur in solar and renewables. The need for improvements to infrastructure was brought up by this panel also.

Mike Amabile introduced the community panel:

Community Panel

Bob McLaughlin, Mercy Medical Center Merced
Paul Lo, attorney and community leader
Diana Almanza, A Woman's Place (with Ana Pagan, Director of Merced County Human Services Agency)
Hicham Eltal, Merced Irrigation District

Health services are important to the future of the county. Mercy Medical Center is currently building a new facility in Merced. This panel reflected on some issues brought up by other panels including the need for more economic development, job opportunities, educational opportunities, especially in the health fields. One panelist focused on the needs of immigrants, while another focused on the needs of women in rural areas. The problems of poverty methamphetamine use, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, homelessness, and gangs were identified as key issues affecting Valley communities.

Water quality was discussed as well. It is believed that the state water bond would provide no funding for Merced County, leaving it with only local resources.

Public comments were then taken.

Tom Grave representing Transportation Involves Everyone spoke about the need for housing near jobs rather than near highways. He stressed that farmland must be protected and that high speed rail may offer a good alternative.

Cindy Lashbrook, a local farmer, spoke about the needs to focus on the environment and environmental issues.

Denard Davis, formerly an assistant superintendent with Merced County Office of Education, spoke about the need for experimental education.

Jean Okuye, a local farmer and member of the Central Valley Food and Farmland Coalition, spoke about the need to protect agricultural land.

Charles Magnusson, a local farmer, voiced his concern regarding increase development and its impact on the environment and farmland.

Diane Westmoreland Pedrozo representing the Merced County Farm Bureau emphasized that recent housing projects have not been paying for themselves in terms of infrastructure and commented that high speed rail will bring more housing. Farmland is being prematurely parcelized into ranchettes.

Bill Hatch representing the Central Valley Safe Environment Network talked about the indemnification process.

Bryant Owens of the Planada Association talked about a migrant housing project and a baseball field in Planada that are both being built on prime farm land.

Lydia Miller spoke about the Merced County general plan and criticized UC Merced for circumventing CEQA.

At the conclusion of the testimony, Secretary McPeak summed up the themes expressed. She spoke about the jobs housing balance with the Bay area and southern California that affects the Central Valley.

Agriculture Secretary A. J. Kawamura talked briefly about historic changes in agriculture and the need for agricultural infrastructure and additional attention to combat the invasive species. Deputy Co-Chairs Connie Conway and Fritz Grupe gave brief summaries and thanked participants for attending.

Secretary McPeak thanked Merced County and the Board of Supervisors for hosting the forum and all those who provided testimony and public input. The next forum will be held tomorrow, May 19, at Central California Children's Hospital in Madera.

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Public Forum Attendees

Board Members Present:

Local Elected Officials:

Co-Chair: Supervisor Connie Conway, County of Tulare

Mayor Michael Amabile, City of Los Banos

Councilman Paul Boyer, City of Farmersville

Councilwoman Marcelyn Buford, City of Hanford

Supervisor Gary Gilbert, County of Madera

Supervisor Jeff Grover, County of Stanislaus

Supervisor Victor Mow, County of San Joaquin

Civic Leaders:

Co-Chair: Fritz Grupe, The Grupe Company, Stockton

Sheila Carroll, Ross F. Carroll, Inc.

Ray Dezember, Bakersfield Californian

Larry Fortune, Fortune Associates

Lorraine Salazar, Sal's Mexican Restaurants

Sharron Thornton, The Grass is Greener Landscape Management

Cabinet Secretaries:

A. G. Kawamura, Secretary, Department of Food and Agriculture

Sunne Wright McPeak, Secretary, Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency

Cabinet Designees:

Ricardo Soto, representing Secretary Alan Bersin

Kate Tansey, representing Secretary Victoria Bradshaw

Cindy Tuck, representing California Environmental Protection Agency

Board Members not present:

Mayor Alan Autry, City of Fresno

Kim Belshe, Secretary, Health and Human Services Agency

Councilwoman Susan Benham, City of Bakersfield

Alan Bersin, Secretary of Education

Victoria Bradshaw, Secretary, Labor and Workforce Development Agency

Mike Chrisman, Secretary, Resources Agency

Coke Hallowell, San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust

Rosario Marin, Secretary, State and Consumer Services Agency
Jose Rivera, Kaiser Permanente
Fred Ruiz, Ruiz Foods Corporation

Designated Officials:

Appointed Liaisons:

Pete Weber, ANRON International, Fresno, Liaison to the Federal Interagency Taskforce

Other Key Partners:

Supporting Agencies:

John Cox, Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency
Jonnalee Henderson, Department of Food and Agriculture
Mark Keppler, The Maddy Institute, California State University, Fresno
Carolyn Lott, Great Valley Center
Nancy Lungren, Department of Food and Agriculture
Mike Lynch, Great Valley Center
Theresa Sebasto, California Water Institute, California State University, Fresno
Ashley Swearengin, Central California Futures Institute, California State University, Fresno
Jim Tischer, California Water Institute, California State University, Fresno
Belen Torres, Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency
Carol Whiteside, President, Great Valley Center

Other Guests:

Diana Almanza, Executive Director, A Woman's Place of Merced County
Lee Anderson, Merced County Superintendent of Schools
Andrea Baker, Director, Merced County Department of Workforce Investment
Louie Bandoni, President, Merced County Farm Bureau
Linda Beattie, Employment Development Department, Workforce Investment Division
Andrea Bressel, Valley Public Television
Jesse Brown, Merced County Association of Governments
Dan Cismowski, Assistant Agriculture Commissioner, Merced County
Chris Collins, Merced Sun-Star
Rochelle Cosh, farmer; member, Central Valley Food and Farmland Coalition
Natalie Culver, Employer Focused Training Center, Merced College
Stacey Dabbs, Office of Congressman Dennis Cardoza
Dee Dee D'Adamo, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Congressman Dennis Cardoza
Denard Davis, George Washington Carver South Dos Palos Project
Patti Dossetti, Merced Union High School District
Hicham ElTal, Assistant General Manager of Water Resources, Merced Irrigation District
Scott Galbraith, Merced County Economic Development Corporation
John Garamendi, Vice Chancellor, University of California, Merced
Bart Garcia, Councilman, Gustine City Council
Tom Grave, Transportation Involves Everyone; Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth

Terrence Grindall, Ranchwood Homes
Dennis Haines, Family Resource Council of Merced County Office of Education; Board
President of Core Connection
Bill Hatch, Central Valley Safe Environment Network
Mark Hendrickson, President, Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce
Eric Johnson, AT&T
Jim Kanabay, Merced County Economic Development Corporation
Marjorie Kirn, Merced County Association of Governments
Cheryl Lang, Office of Congressman Jim Costa
Cindy Lashbrook, farmer
Andrew Lim, Office of Senator Charles Poochigian
Eleanor Lima, member, California Women for Agriculture
Paul Lo, attorney
Kyle Loreto, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of Fresno Mayor Alan Autry
Charles Magnusson, farmer
Bob McLaughlin, Marketing Director, Mercy Medical Center
Lydia Miller, San Joaquin Raptor Wildlife Rescue Center; Protect Our Water
Mike Nelson, Chairman, Merced County Board of Supervisors
Jean Okuye, farmer; President, Central Valley Food and Farmland Coalition
Joe Oliveira, Councilman, Gustine City Council
Bryant Owens, member of the public
Mark Pazin, Sheriff, Merced County
Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, Executive Director, Merced County Farm Bureau;
member, California Women for Agriculture
Joanne Presnell, Assistant Director, Merced County Department of Workforce
Investment
Frank Quintero, Development Manager, City of Merced
Steve Rath, City Manager, City of Los Banos
Larry Salinas, University of California, Merced
Salvador Sandoval, Family Physician, Golden Valley Health Center
Bob Smith, Merced County Department of Public Works and Special Projects
Kevin Stone, Building Industry Association of Merced County
Kathy Weber, member, Merced League of Women Voters; East Merced Resource
Conservation District
Henry Seng Xiong, Job Developer, Merced Lao Family Community